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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL STAFFDEL VISITS
TWO BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY CENTREERS (BOCs)
IN ZIMBABWE

REF: HARARE 01157

Chitungwiza Business Opportunity Centreer

1. On July 2nd, Congressional Professional Staffers Joan Condon and Pearl Alice Marsh, House International Relations Committee, and USAID Congressional Liaison Officer, Susan Williams, were joined by Acting USAID Director, Michael Foster, and Econ Opportunities Team Leader, Sarah Bishop, on a fact finding visit to a USAID-funded Business Opportunity Centreer(BOC) based in Chitungwiza, a town with a population of overaround one million, situated close to Harare. The Chitungwiza BOC has been open since July 2003.

2. On arrival at the BOC, the group was welcomed by One-Up-Business Training Trust, a local NGO who manages the centers under a sub-grant from Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI). DAI is the implementing contractor for USAID's Access to Economic Opportunities for Disadvantaged Groups Project. The BOC manager gave a presentation on the variety of programs offered, in particular the business training modules, and their links to HIV/AIDS education programs. At each workstation laminated brochures list various websites, including local and international news (e.g., CNN, and BBC), HIV/AIDS education and advisory organizations, business, sports and training sites. The BOC also offers telephone, fax, photocopying and scanning facilities.

GOKWE Business Opportunity Centerre

3. On Saturday July 3rd, the Staffdel /USAID group were joined by Embassy Political Chief, WinJohn Dayton, on an early start visit to Gokwe Growth Point. Gokwe is a thriving rural settlement situated over 300 kilometers from Harare in traditional communal land, where the predominant cash crop is cotton. Gokwe has little or no access to the outside world.

4. The Staffdel was met by DAI and One-Up-Business Training Trust staff, and were given a tour of the premises. Prominent posters of up-coming training events and advertisements for New Start HIV/AIDS voluntary testing centers were displayed around the walls. Photocopying, fax and scanning facilities were available for public use.

5. The Gokwe BOC manager discussed the variety of activities offered at the Center, emphasizing outreach programs to nearby schools. As at Chitungwiza, the Gokwe BOC had a list of websites beside each workstation, guiding the users to different media websitessources of information for news, HIV/AIDS, small business, and other sites of general interest.

COMMENTS

16. The Staffdel expressed admiration for the excellent work of the BOCs in small and micro-business development and support, and in providing uncensored access to news and information to the public. USAID/Zimbabwe appreciates the interest the Staffdel took in our assistance program and, in particular, in the BOCs. We were extremely pleased to learn, shortly after the conclusion of the staffdel, of the decision of the House International Relations Committee to release the hold on funding for this program. SULLIVAN

17. The Staffdel did not have time to review and clear this cable prior to their departure.

WEISENFELD